

FEATHER RIVER ACTION! ON FOREST FIRES AND CLEARCUTS



THE FINAL STRAW RADIO
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Josh Hart of Feather River Action! in Plumas county joined me to speak about US Forest Service plans for an emergency thinning of forests in this north east part of so-called California and which is threatened to be reproduced in other Federal and private lands in the name of fire prevention around the country. We talk about the claims, motivations and alternative proposals of activists, scientists and community members and the upcoming Lost Sierra Forest-Climate Action Camp happening in the area at the end of May 23-29th.

Feather River Action!: <http://featherriveraction.org/>
Lost Sierra Forest-Climate Action Camp: <https://lostsierraforest.wordpress.com/>

Here are a few more groups working on the issue:

<http://featherriverwatershedalliance.org/>
<http://johnmuirproject.org/>

Search for this interview title at <https://thefinalstrawradio.noblogs.org/> to find links to further resources on this topic, featured music, the audio version, and files for printing copies of this episode.

Cover image from <https://featherriveraction.org/>

TFSR: Would you please introduce yourself to the audience with your name, gender pronouns, location, or any other affiliations that you want to share?

Josh Hart: Yeah, thanks for having me on. My name is Josh Hart, he/him are my pronouns, and I'm the spokesperson for Feather River Action. Our website is FeatherRiverAction.org. We defend the vital Feather River Watershed and build community. That's our goal. We're based in Plumas County, California between Tahoe and Lassen in northeastern California, and we were formed in 2021, which was the same year that the Dixie Fire burned almost half the county. We oppose a series of industrial threats to wild areas, including two asphalt plant proposals over the past three years right by the river, the headwaters of the Feather River, and we have opposed one aggregate mine near the headwaters. There's an increasing industrial and extraction threat to rural areas, which are increasingly being treated as sacrifice zones, and we're trying to raise awareness and build resistance to these plans.

TFSR: Cool. Thank you very much for being willing to talk about this important work that y'all are engaged in.

Would you tell us a bit about this area that you're in? Some of the areas that I have heard named in documents on your website are Lost Sierra, and I know that the Plumas National Forest is right around there. Could talk a little bit about some of the ecology there, some of the animals and plants, and also the industries that exist there?

Josh Hart: So, Plumas County more or less overlaps with the Plumas National Forest, and the Lost Sierra refers to the Feather River Watershed. This is the area between Lake Tahoe in the south and Lassen in the north. That kind of encompasses a very large area.

It's called Lost Sierra because it hasn't been as heavily impacted by tourism or development as some other places in the Sierra Nevada Mountain range. So that means there's less population. For example, there is only 18,000 population in a county the size of Delaware. So, it's a vast area with very small communities and very low population. This has allowed the wild to recuperate from the decades of damage inflicted on it.

So now, we have ancient forests, which is recovering, we have two wolf packs in Plumas County who have come probably down from Oregon to expand into new territory. People have taken photographs of entire prides of mountain lions. I mean, when have you heard of a pride of mountain lions? Something you only hear about in Africa. So even though this is not like an intact ecosystem, like we would talk about in some parts of Alaska that are completely untouched, a lot of it is mostly intact.

We have some really essential carbon storage in the form of mature and old growth forests, and these ancient forests are just irreplaceable. One of the only rain forests in the Sierra Nevada Mountain range is found in Strawberry Valley, unfortunately one of the areas they want to log. There are many, many endangered and threatened and sensitive species of plants and animals in our area. I grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area, and when I moved to Plumas County, I was astounded to see river otters and the river, beavers making dams, just something you don't see a lot in more urbanized areas. And we need to protect that wild and allow it to recover further, to rewild it, not bring in all these extractive industries.

TFSR: Large predators often mean, to my understanding, that there's a pretty healthy and complex ecosystem that they're a part of that can sustain their immediate food sources and those food sources that they feed on and so on and so forth. So, as you said even if it's not intact as in untouched by humans, and there have been people living in like that area of California anyway since time immemorial, but that says a lot about the communities of animals and plants and how they interact, right?

Josh Hart: Yeah, predators are essential for healthy ecology. They are absolutely part of the ecological cycle, and the fact that we do have wolf packs coming back to Plumas after 100 years of not being here and we do have a prides of mountain lions and all of these animals, foxes and bobcats, and so forth, shows that there is a healthy ecology. Just so your listeners are aware that the Feather River is the largest watershed in California. It's responsible for providing water to 26 million Californians as well as a lot of agriculture through Lake Oroville. So, this is a really essential water source for the whole of California. It's really essential wildlife habitat that is touched less than other places in California.

The way that the Feather River got its name was that when European settlers first came to this area, what they witnessed was a moving conveyor belt of feathers. They couldn't even see the river itself, the water of the river, because there were so many birds that lived in this area, their feathers literally coated the entire surface of the water. So, our goal as an organization, as Feather River Action, is to get back to approaching that point, to say this is an area that is already wild that we can go further with, and that we can build back those populations of animals and plants so that there really is a healthy thriving wild ecosystem. That's also going to benefit local economies, too.

TFSR: Can you talk a little bit about those human economies and what sort of industries the populace of your area is engaging in and how that relates to the natural environment there?

Josh Hart: So, you know, Plumas County is a logging community. You go into Quincy, which is the county seat of Plumas County, and maybe about two-thirds of the businesses will have, “We support the timber industry” placards up, so it’s a very much a pro-timber industry community. There are people here who are not pro-timber industry and who are here because of the wild and there’s a bunch of people in between too. This is a rural community, so very low density. You have people working for government agencies, you have people working for the small local hospitals, people working from home increasingly.

We’ve been impacted by the Dixie Fire, which burned half of Plumas County, including the town of Greenville, three years ago. So, people who lost their homes are having to rebuild. Plumas County is a very unique place. It’s a place that’s relatively affordable still and relatively wild and it’s in California. Those things are really increasingly rare. So, we have a lot of people coming in from Tahoe and elsewhere, the Bay Area, buying up property. In Portola, which is the only incorporated city in Plumas County, a lot of these small kind of fire-prone houses are being redone and rented out because the lack of available and affordable housing in the Truckee and Tahoe area is kind of gradually heading north. So, people are working in Truckee, working in Tahoe, and then living in our area and commuting. That’s not great from a climate perspective, but it is a knock-on impact from the tech industry effect on rents and housing prices in the Bay Area that’s spread outward from the Bay Area.

TFSR: You’ve mentioned a couple of the large fires that happened in the last decade that severely impacted your area. But obviously, these were big enough to spread and have impacts throughout the rest of the state, whether it be flames actually working their way to towards the coast, or terrible air quality, or pollution in the water supplies. One of the reasons that we were here to talk is because Feather River Action and other groups’ response to the US Forest Service plans for cutting parts of the forest. So that’s the Community Protection Plan is that right? Is that the same as the Central and West Slope Project?

Josh Hart: So, we’re calling this project that the US Forest Service wants to carry out in our area the Community Destruction Project. They’re calling it the Community Protection Project. This is basically the some of the most aggressive logging that’s ever taken place. They are using the fear of wildfire, people’s very justified fear of wildfire, to justify this extreme logging, when it will not achieve the goals that they set out for the project. It’s a \$650 million program. So, the good part of a billion dollars heading straight for one small rural county in Northern California.

It’s 275,000 acres altogether. The Central and West Slope portion of this

is one portion. There's also an East Side portion closer to Susanville. But together we're talking about over 400 square miles of industrial deforestation and herbicide application. In their documents they admit to carrying out up to 77% canopy reduction, which is essentially a clear cut, leaving 23% of the canopy untouched. They're targeting trees which are up to eight feet in circumference. These are large, mature, fire-resistant trees that they're logging in the name of fire resistance. They are using propaganda and fear to push forward an aggressive timber harvest agenda that not only targets California but also several other western states. Idaho and Montana are also targeted, the forest down in the Big Sur area, Ventana, that area, that's also targeted with a similar scale of forest treatments, which refers to intensive logging.

So essentially what the Biden administration is doing, they announced several months ago, you might have seen this, that we're going to phase out logging in old growth and mature forests, and we're going to protect these forests as carbon storage. It sounded really, really good. But with the other hand of the Biden administration, with the head of the US Forest Service agriculture department, Tom Vilsack, he's basically authorized this emergency declaration to authorize extreme logging in many of these old growth and mature areas that the Biden administration is claiming to protect. I think it's 2025 when these regulations come into effect. So, they're planning to basically, from my perspective looking at the situation, cut the old growth and mature forests while the regulations still allow it, while saying that they're protecting it. Their protections only go into effect once these forests have been cut, basically.

So it's not an honest thing, and we are pretty outraged that so much money, nearly a billion dollars, is going to fund forest destruction that will make wildfires more extreme, while ignoring the very real needs of people in local communities to have immediate financial assistance with home hardening and with creation of defensible space, which are the only things that science identifies as being associated with structure survival during a wildfire. So, structure defense, defensible space, and a fire containment personnel within that space.

If you log out in the forest miles away from communities, there is strong evidence that these kinds of treatment management activities actually speed up fires. So, the winds that blow wildfires that grow wildfires are able to blow faster through thin forest because natural forest acts as a windbreak. Especially in the eastern part of the state, which is drier, forests have evolved to trap moisture, to keep moisture available to the plants and to the trees that use it. And by thinning, you allow wind and sun to penetrate the canopy and a massive drying out.

So, my wife and I, we live in what's called the wildland-urban interface, the WUI, and we're really alarmed by what the Forest Service is planning because what it means is that when a wildfire comes—and wildfires are inevitable, they're going

to come—that the wildfire will travel faster through a thin forest than it would have through the forest as it stands now. It’s wild. And that means direct impacts to us, such as reduced time to evacuate our animals or family, to pack everything into cars and to get out of there if we need to.

There’s a lot of manipulation of fear and a public understanding of these issues, and we’re trying to set the record straight.

TF SR: Can you talk a bit about some of the sourcing for your documents, just some of the scientific papers that have been published and some of the people that make a living studying this stuff that you refer to?

Josh Hart: So, a really great source of scientific information that really shifted my understanding of this whole issue is a book called Smokescreen by Chad Hanson. We have been distributing that book in Plumas County. Chad Hanson is an expert in wildfire policy and forest management. He runs the John Muir project, who is one of the three plaintiffs, including ourselves and Plumas Forest project, who are actually taking the US Forest Service to court to require an environmental impact statement on this project.

TF SR: I can put a link in the show notes for that if folks are interested in getting a copy. So having moved to the East Coast from the West Coast and seeing conversations and seeing the impacts of climate change on forest fire patterns. A couple of years ago, eastern Tennessee and parts of western North Carolina suffered some pretty heavy fires. This is 2017 I want to say. I had the assumptions that forest fires are a part of the life cycle of forests, having grown up on the West Coast and understanding that certain trees don’t proliferate unless there’s a fire to make space and also the heat to open up the seeds and such. But that’s not the case. We shouldn’t be having fires on the same scale here.

But I wonder if you could talk a little bit about, just for folks that may not be aware, when you mentioned trees being protected from fire, pretty fire resistant, and also a little bit about how fire plays a part in the ecosystem and some of the forests in California. That could be useful for listeners who maybe aren’t as familiar.

Josh Hart: So, the trees that they’re targeting are actually eight feet around. So, eight feet in circumference, which is basically 30-inch width at breast height at maximum. Just to be clear on that. Yeah, in general, fires are healthy for ecosystems. Ecosystems and ecologies adapted, they evolved, to be able to survive fire. Fire acts as a rejuvenating agent. Fire often burns litter on the forest floor, it provides nu-

trients to new saplings. So you go back after a fire, even if a very intense fire goes through, and there's all this life coming back up just raring to go. Threatened species, such as the California spotted owl and the black backed woodpecker, actually depend on intensely burned areas for their feeding because little rodents love that kind of area where it's burned.

So, a lot of the time you'll see the US Forest Service and the logging industry bemoaning, "Oh, these wildfires are destroying our forests!" That's just not true. What's destroying our forests is post-fire logging, where they come in after a fire and cut down trees that are either dead or dying or perfectly healthy and alive. We see those trees being hauled out like a conveyor belt, truck after truck, heading down Highway 70 in Quincy. So those are being pulled out. The lack of dense forest, of dense mature and healthy forest, is associated with declines in the spotted owl population. So, the US Fish and Wildlife Service is in the process of listing the California spotted owl as an endangered species. Just as they're doing that the US Forest Service is taking 80,000 acres of formerly protected nesting habitat and foraging habitat and opening it up to industrial and mechanical logging, just without explanation. And unilaterally they have not held a single public meeting.

I think people need to realize (and this is something that I didn't realize when I moved to this area) that we kind of knew that there was going to be logging behind us at some time. We've grown really attached to the forest behind us. It's incredibly beautiful. There are aspens and streams and springs, and it's really a beautiful, unique woodland behind us. We always assumed there was going to be logging, but what we didn't realize was that the US Forest Service, the US government, and these forces in the timber industry that are pushing these projects forward, they really detest the wild. They hate the wild. What they want to do is not just come in and cut and take, they want to convert this wild land with a diverse shrubs and some shrubs that live hundreds of years and provide food and shelter for many species, they want to clear everything and using herbicides continually treat the native shrubs that are coming back so that only the crop, only the timber, is going to grow back. So right now, you can walk out your house many places in Plumas County and go back into wild forest where trees are several 100 years old, where the forest really hasn't been touched since large scale logging early in the 20th century. If this project goes forward, people will be walking through a poisoned landscape, a damaged landscape, around communities full of slash piles which burn readily and full of small trees which also burned readily.

So, we didn't quite grasp the fact that there were plans to basically... They look at the wild and they say, "Oh, this is wasted space. This is not productive for our economy. This is not productive for capitalism. How can we make this productive?" Animals and plants don't have rights. The ones that are the most impacted by humans, that are the most on the edge, have legal rights under NEPA system and

under California Environmental Quality Act, but all the other ones are not even mentioned. The fact that bulldozers can come in, masticators can come in and just basically murder native animals and native ecologies is just taken for granted.

I think some people in Plumas County and beyond are of the notion of, “Oh, these wildfires are just insane. We’ve got to do something. We’ve got to go out into the forest. We’ve got to create a buffer.” It’s a very reactive approach. If we look very carefully at the science, the science is telling us that this massive increase in wildfire activity in California is related to climate change. It’s related to human caused gases in the atmosphere that’s making higher winds and higher temperatures more likely. And those are the factors which can lead to large wildfires.

So instead of attacking the climate crisis and saying, “Okay, we’ve got to slash emissions, we got to figure out how to absorb this carbon from the atmosphere,” they are instead embarking on this dangerous cycle, this self-fulfilling cycle, where they’re reacting to wildfire by cutting forests which are huge sponges for carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and we need them to remain intact in order to absorb that carbon. But they’re cutting them. And as a result, once you cut a tree it starts to off-gas that carbon into the atmosphere right away. People think, “Oh, well logging, it goes into furniture and houses and the carbon just stays there.” Only between about 15 to 18% according to studies of the carbon in wood that’s harvested in the forest is actually stored in the final product. The vast, vast majority is into the atmosphere and worsens the kind of preconditions that lead to the severe wildfires.

So, we need to embark on an emergency effort to harden homes, to provide grants to harden homes if you can’t afford it, if you’re not wealthy, and we need to provide grants for hand thinning and under burning in the immediate area around communities. So that means 100 to 200 feet. That’s what the science shows is really critical in terms of reducing structures burning in a wildfire.

There’s a little bit of ignorance. There’s one part ignorance, and there’s one part arrogance. The ignorance part is that it’s all about fuels. It’s not all about fuels, and anyone who tries to build a fire in a wood stove will know that it’s not just about fuels. It’s about how moist they are and how much oxygen is allowed to access that. So, if you transfer that to a forest, yes, we need to reduce fuels right by your house that would feed the flames, but going out into the forest to try and engineer forests so that fire personnel can come in and try and control these huge fires. I mean, when these things come through, you just need to get out of the way.

I was driving to Reno during one of the fires a couple of years ago, and there was what’s called a “fire-nado”, just one of these things where the fire creates currents...

TFSR: A firestorm! [laughs]

Josh Hart: A firestorm, yeah. You saw these flames going up in a corkscrew, hundreds and hundreds of feet up into the atmosphere. I just got chills all over my body, because suddenly, all this stuff, all the statistics about the climate crisis and everything just became very real. This is our backyard. These are forces of nature that we've unleashed that are really, really intense and can be dangerous. So, the fact that we have a government who's using pseudoscience and pushing forward logging as a solution to these wildfires, when it's actually going to exacerbate the climate crisis, which caused the wildfire crisis, it's really disturbing.

Suddenly you realize this is a captured agency, the US Forest Service. This is not a neutral agency that serves the public, that manages public lands. The reality is that the US Forest Service is corrupt. It is compromised by the timber industry that it pretends to regulate and that it needs to be replaced by another agency who is going to treat public lands as sacred and as a crucial source of carbon. Right now, the Forest Service is not doing that. They are embarking on a very dangerous path with a lot of opposition in the local area.

TFSR: There was a couple of other points around the forest I think it's really important to note. I was trying not to distract myself with that that phrase, "seeing forest for the trees" or whatever. When we're talking about this, it can be very easy to just focus on the big boys in the forest—the trees themselves—but that's not the ecosystem itself. And as you mentioned, the Feather River is a very important watershed for a lot of the rest of the state, let alone the local population there.

So, two things water related: I wonder if you could talk really quick about thinning of trees, the destruction or salvaging or whatever they want to call it of brush and fallen trees and other things and how that relates to erosion. The other thing is a little bit more about all of those herbicides that you were talking about them applying and what that could mean for down the stream, folks in the Bay, folks in the Central Valley.

Josh Hart: So, you're right. The forest, typically especially federal agencies, state agencies, and foresters will look at the forest and say, "It's a bunch of trees, it's marketable timber, we're going to take it out." Obviously, if you ask an ecologist or someone who is very familiar with all the residents of the forest... there are microorganisms in the soil that we're just discovering now, and we don't understand all of the details of how this ecosystem works. What science has discovered over the recent years is that trees and shrubs communicate through mycelium. They send each other messages. If there's a struggling tree or shrub, the other trees and shrubs will pitch in and send that tree or shrub resources so that it can survive, and then that favor is paid back. Trees are not these objects. They are aware beings that form

communities and that support each other when times are hard.

This kind of evidence is ignored and dismissed by the Forest Service, who use a competitive model. They basically say, “Oh, well, trees compete with each other for resources, and they take water from the ground. They’re just basically products.” This is just inconsistent with the science and what we know. But the project, according to the US Forest Service, the project will emit more than 6 million tons of co2 when we should be absorbing and allowing forests to increase their absorption.

In terms of the herbicides that they plan to use: They plan to use seven different herbicides, including glyphosate, which is known to cause cancer and known to run off into water bodies. They’re also using an herbicide called Ecomazapyr which is illegal in the EU due to its high toxicity. So according to one scientific assessment, the comments by Dr. O’Brien to the project, this basically constitutes the largest single experiment on the people of Plumas County that’s ever been carried out. I asked the Forest Service how much actual herbicide is going to be distributed across the landscape, and they told me \$30 million is the budget to pay the people who apply the herbicide, but they wouldn’t give me a total of the amount of the actual cost of the herbicide.

Well, \$30 million... if you go to the Walmart website and you type in round up and see how many gallons you can get... we’re talking several Olympic-sized swimming pools full of glyphosate. They wouldn’t tell me. So I said, “Well, this is what I’m estimating.” They just don’t provide that information. That’s really important information to know because these are long lasting toxins. They will flow into the Feather River, there’s no doubt about that. And they’re being used in a way that undermines the basic ecology and the carbon storage of our area.

When you talk about a major logging project, or thinning, or whatever they want to call it, you’re talking about huge levels. 40 square miles. You’re talking about soil compaction from the vehicles that are going to be going in here from the masticators, from the feller bunches. You’re talking about soil compaction, which inhibits soil’s ability to absorb carbon and starts the cycle emitting, so forests become net emitters of carbon instead. And they say, “Oh, we won’t cut trees that are above 30 inches across or eight feet around.” But of course, if they want to build a road, or if there’s a hazard tree or a million other reasons, they do find excuses to cut down these large trees.

We’re talking about Strawberry Valley, which is the rain forest in Plumas County. Trees that have more precipitation grow faster. So, they’ve been wanting to get their chainsaws on these forests for many, many years. When the Dixie Fire and the Camp Fire happened in California, I’m assuming they’re just kind of like licking their lips and rubbing their hands together and going, “Okay, now’s our chance to really take out these forests that we’ve been wanting to.”

When you look at Paradise, where 85 people died, many of them died because they didn't have advance notice to evacuate, and that fire approached Paradise up a hillside that the US Forest Service had treated for community protection several years ago, and they told residents "Oh, we're doing this for your protection. It'll protect you." Perhaps some residents failed to do certain defensible space or home hardening because they thought "Oh, the US Forest Service has got my back. They're going to stop any fires that might come through." But they didn't. And because some people didn't have landlines and they relied on their cell phones, but the cell tower burned in advance of the evacuation. That lack of notification is why people died and the availability of a landline to many people is why they just barely survived.

So that's another issue we're fighting in California. AT&T is threatening landlines, which is really a big threat to our area and to other rural areas in the state that need to have reliable communications in the event of a wildfire.

TFSR: That makes sense. But erosion?

Josh Hart: Yeah. Plant matter, forest litter, mulch, all of that, when it when a raindrop comes from the sky, those things will dissipate the energy of the raindrop and will allow it to percolate into the soil. When you have soil that is compacted, that is laid bare, you have erosion. That is a very frequent occurrence of logging. You drive to Quincy or bus to Quincy, you look up at the hillsides, and they are badly eroded. They've been heavily logged after the Claremont Fire. They were heavily sprayed with herbicide, so you don't have those plants and shrubs coming back to hold the soil in place. They're just a mess up there. It's just an ecological mess. And this is a small part right in Plumas County, but it's threatening to spread to a much wider area. I don't think people are quite prepared for the reality of this massive industrial project.

TFSR: I was wondering if there's been input on the proposed plan by any significant part of the Maidu or other native peoples whose ancestors have lived on these lands forever or if there are any of their practices that have been proposed to deal with the very real dangers of these forest fires.

Josh Hart: I should say, first of all, that state and federal agencies that want to embark on a major project like this are required to consult with local Native American tribes. That consultation, it often comes in the form of a letter. Often these tribes receive dozens to hundreds of letters. So, it's not possible for them to respond meaningfully to each one. But I know that on this particular project, the so-called Community Protection Project, it's my understanding that no local tribes actually

did weigh in on this.

But in general, I do know some Native Americans who live locally in the area who are very opposed to this. Some tribes get income from timber harvests and other issues, so that is a factor in all of this. But I think it's safe to say that the industrial equipment and the herbicides are something that are not consistent with traditional Native land management. Certainly, some fires, intentionally burning fires, have been carried out by Native Americans to improve hunting grounds and to improve the ecology.

That's something that we support when it's done in consultation with native tribes, and it's done with sensitivity to the growth cycle of plants, intentional under burning can reduce fuels directly around communities and help defend homes, which really needs to be the primary reason. We can't just build flammable homes in wildfire area and think that those will survive. We need to need to really change our policy on that. So, we're going the really the wrong way with these forest projects.

TFSR: With the home hardening idea that you were referencing and defensibility, if you've got a bunch of people moving into the area who are renting from people that own the property, how much investment there is from people, working class or tech bros or whatever they happen to be, to actually improve the property and make it safer or from the landlords to do such a thing. You mentioned clearing 100 feet around the structure. There are some other things that have listed on the Feather River Action website. And these aren't necessarily your proposals. These are widely understood and even government-promoted proposals for hardening houses and community spaces. Can you talk a little bit about what some of those are?

Josh Hart: Yeah. 10 years ago, I was fairly ignorant about this stuff, but I bought my first home six years ago. It was definitely not fire safe even though it was in the WUI, the wildland-urban interface. I did a lot of research into what factors were most important in the survivability of structures because if we are putting money into this house. Insurance is very expensive. A lot of people can't afford insurance to cover the whole cost of their house, so they have to get insurance to cover half the cost of their house, rebuild a lot smaller or something.

So, I did a lot of research into this area. What I found was that ember, burning embers, are the single largest cause of home burnings during a wildfire. Embers can fly up to two, three miles or more when there's heavy winds in front of a fire, and they can start new spot fires. So, what's particularly important, and you saw this in the Maui fires, a lot of that community burned, but some of the houses that survived were newly constructed homes that stopped embers from getting in.

So, with embers, you want to make sure that all screens are fire hardened. We have screens that actually seal up when the temperature gets too high. Making sure that any opening that's an eighth of an inch or more that will allow embers to squeeze in and maybe light some pine needles on fire... Those are the kinds of things. You want to think like a fire. If you hold a lighter to around your house, is it going to burn? You're going to imagine a bunch of lit matches landing on and around your house and how are you going to stop this house from burning. So, fire resistant cement siding, which ironically, not everything is easy, cement siding has a huge carbon footprint too. So, there aren't really a bunch of really easy solutions.

But as far as saving your home, fire resistant siding, plugging up those vents. Clearing the first five feet is critical around a house, so clearing any dead vegetation. When we say defensible space, we don't mean go and murder every living thing within 100 feet of your house, but you just want to make sure that the fire isn't carried from the forest onto your property and onto your house if you want to have defensible space where a firefighter can or you can go and put out the flames. So that's really key.

The embers count for, I believe, about 85% of home ignitions. Direct radiative heat from the forest accounts for some of the rest. That is what is critical. That is the piece that is really critical in terms of protecting human communities because if we get to a point where human communities are properly defended against fire, fire can just become what it always has been, which is another kind of weather event which ecology and environment really depend on in order to reduce some of these fuels.

Right now, you know, we've been engaged in fire suppression and heavy industrial logging, especially with old growth areas. Those two things have led to where we are now. That logging is not this fuel removal wonder solution to the problem. It actually adds to the carbon burden in the atmosphere, it leaves a bunch of flammable material around, and it allows wildfires to travel more quickly through dried out and desiccated windy environments that threaten people's lives.

TFSR: Yeah, I had family that was living in Santa Rosa when the Tubbs Fire came through, and in the Coffey neighborhood in the north of town it was embers that were going across eight lanes of 101 and just blowing through the air for miles landing on people's roofs, sparking it, spreading it throughout the neighborhood, and people had no idea how to deal with it.

Josh Hart: I remember that. I thought that the 101 would stop the flames and the embers just blew right over.

TFSR: Everyone else did too.

Josh Hart: So, you have these initiatives to build these barriers to basically bulldoze 100-foot, 200-foot-wide corridor to block the flames, and embers just blow right over. A lot of the destruction that we see in Plumas County from the Dixie Fire, actually the source of that was the firefighters coming in and bulldozing. They bulldozed a big line across the Bucks Wilderness. So, whether it's a wilderness, it doesn't matter. They will go in. Chris Carlton, who's the Forest Supervisor for the Plumas National Forest, made that call during the Dixie fire to bulldoze the wilderness area. And in fact, it wasn't necessary to protect the town of Quincy.

But the fact that we're leaving our communities vulnerable to wildfire means that there is going to be almost an inevitable push to damage the forest and to reengineer the forest to try and make it safer for fire personnel to go in. But the factors that the US Forest Service modeled during their analysis, they modeled flame lengths. They say, "Oh, well, the flame lengths are going to go from 80 feet down to 20 feet." But they didn't analyze how their actions would modify fuel moisture in the forest or wind speeds. Those two factors are really critical in terms of wildfire safety.

It's not a balanced analysis. The US Forest Service decides to analyze things that they think will back up their case that logging helps protect communities. They ignore all the other evidence. That's pretty typical. But there is a huge amount of science coming forward that the US Forest Service approach is wrong, that the priority needs to be from the communities outward rather than from the forest inward. I believe that their environmental assessment is faulty and that a judge will hopefully agree with our groups. We filed this lawsuit three weeks ago in federal court. We're demanding an environmental impact statement, a more complete assessment, which would buy us time to basically reach out to the community, inform them of the facts and build a popular resistance, against this project.

TF SR: I wonder if we could talk a little bit about some of the companies that are involved in this. So Drax is one that you had mentioned when we were emailing back and forth. But if we could talk about biomass pellets and the capitalist greenwashing of shifting carbon production from one part of the world to another...

Josh Hart: I was a resident in the UK for four or five years when I did my master's degree several years ago, and I took part in a series of Camps for Climate Action. One of those camps, actually before I got to the UK, was outside the Drax coal-fired power station in Yorkshire. At the time, it was the largest coal fire station in the UK and I think responsible for 5% or 6% of the UK's total electricity consumption. Because of climate commitments and so forth, the UK and many other countries have decided to call biomass, a renewable fuel.

So, the propaganda that Drax, which owns this plant, puts out there is that they harvest the fuels, a lot of the time it's just sticks and brush and things that are left over from the timber industry, they'll compress them into pellets, and they'll burn them, and that doesn't burn any fossil fuels, and if they do carbon capture and sequestration, they actually can capture that carbon. So, it sounds good, but the reality is that biomass energy puts out two to three times the amount of carbon per energy unit than coal, which is considered the dirtiest fuel. What Drax was found to be doing is going into British Columbia forests, cutting down trees that were a rare species, like old growth very valuable habitat, and using whole trees to basically create pellets to power the UK's biggest power plant.

So, the assumption is that when you harvest the forest they grow back and that they will absorb that carbon out of the atmosphere. But there's no follow up. There are no regulations by governments. The forest management side and the biomass burning side are two sides of the same coin. So, what we're talking about right now in California, Drax, which is a multinational corporation, signed a memorandum of understanding with Golden State Natural Resources, a pseudo governmental agency, to build two large pellet factories, one in Tuolumne county and one in Lassen County, and an export facility in Stockton. These are some of the lowest income areas in the state already suffering from environmental racism and burdens. Basically, these two biomass plants would essentially consume forests for 100-mile radius around each plant.

So, the one in Lassen is a particular concern to us, and we're very opposed to that because Plumas County forests lie within that 100-mile radius. These are home to like really, really endangered and beleaguered wildlife and habitat. So, when someone says, "Oh, fuel reduction," when they say fuel think habitat because that's what we're talking about here. When the machines come through, they don't stop and allow the animals to evacuate, they just plow through. It's a pretty brutal activity, no matter how you slice it.

In terms of which companies are using the logs from this project, Sierra Pacific is the major logging company. They have a mill here in Quincy. We know that they are planning to use and sell a lot of the materials. Also, a company called Sierra Tahoe Environmental Management LLC was formed in response to the US Forest Service bid solicitation, and they won a contract in December for \$86 million of the logging. So, there's a lot of these opportunistic, new corporations that are springing up. You have basically contractors, who have contractors, who have contractors, who hire contractors to go out in the forest and there's very little oversight from the actual forest service itself. Because it's such a large project, you don't have perhaps the thoroughness of the biological studies that you would have in smaller projects.

For example, we said that the Forest Service, after reading their report, we said, "Well, Which expert said that your project won't have a significant impact on

wolves? Or on the spotted owl? Or on yellow legged frogs?” And they could not give me an answer. They just did not answer me. So, the reality is if you look at this study—’s 800 pages, it looks impressive—but I actually sat down and read it and it really doesn’t add up. I mean, there’s no one listed who’s a qualified expert who can actually make this determination. A lot of it seems to just be copied and pasted from off the shelf, like they’re just trying to push this forward when there’s very likely to be very real risks to highly endangered and threatened species.

TFSR: I wonder if you could talk a bit about the upcoming Lost Sierra Action Camp, what you know about it, where it’s going to be what will be discussed, and how people can get involved with it.

Josh Hart: Sierra Nevada forests are facing their worst threat ever, potentially, through these community destruction projects and land management. They’re encouraging an all-lands approach to this. So, they’re working with private landowners and other landowners to do the same kind of treatments that increase wildfire danger and harm ecology. There’s another pathway that we have available to us, which is, in our view, more sensible, and that is to take all of the Sierra forests, the entire Sierra Nevada Mountain range, and to rewild it and protect it as a vital atmospheric carbon storage and sponge.

When we talk about carbon sequestration, a lot of the time, it’s about competitions to figure out the technology, how we’re going to capture carbon and store it deep underground or something like that. But forests are already doing this, and forests have the capacity to absorb a lot of carbon if we’ll just allow them to grow and to rewild naturally. There’s a study that said that basically 84 million tons of carbon would be sequestered a year if all federal lands were protected. So that’s a huge amount of carbon. Because we not only need to stop burning fossil fuels, and stop eating as much meat, and change our transportation, and our utility systems, but we have a bunch of carbon up there that is not safe going forward We need to draw that down. So, forests are really the low hanging fruit, the easy way to do that.

In areas that have been rewarded in Europe, we see local economies improve, economic opportunities for local people that act as guides, and a real interest and inspiration from the general population to go to these places to see an intact ecosystem. So that’s what we continue to push for. We hold that vision. We are particularly excited about a group called Lost Sierra Forest Defense, which is going to be holding an action camp here in Plumas County from May 23rd to 29th over Memorial Day weekend. This is for folks from all over the country to come and to experience the Lost Sierra and these ancient forests. Our hope is that the public outrage and pressure will force an end to these unlawful forest demolition plans, essentially.

We've been invited to do a workshop at the camp. We're really excited about people coming in from outside the area, people from within the area who were alarmed about the loss of their natural forests, coming together and having fun experiencing the wild areas that are at risk and taking action to protect them. People can find out more about that by going to LostSierraForest.wordpress.com. General updates about the resistance to the community destruction project can be found on our website at FeatherRiverAction.org.

We've seen increasing resistance, particularly in the West, this year against these outrageous old growth and mature logging plans. Particularly in Oregon, there's the Poor Windy sale that the Bureau of Land Management is trying to push through. Some brave souls from up there are currently occupying one of the old growth trees that they want to cut down to access this area. We stand in solidarity with these folks and any other folks around Western forests who are working to protect them, who are working to be the last line of defense for these sensitive ecosystems.

We're hoping that this summer will be a summer of action. What the Forest Service is doing is threatening to reignite the timber wars of the 1990s. Because of the scale and the aggressiveness of their plans, the public needs to come together. We hope to see you soon here in Plumas County. We need folks here on the ground, going out into the forests. If you want to come contact us through FeatherRiverAction.org and we'll find a place for you. But we do need people to come here and be on the ground defense for the forest and its inhabitants.

I think that something like this can only be pushed through with an undercurrent of human supremacy, really, because it says that, "Human needs are more important," that we can just bulldoze the homes and the lives of forest dwellers without repercussions. I think that's not consistent with what we know to be true about ecology, and it's not true or consistent with what we know about climate science. The fact that these folks, Lost Sierra Forest Defense, are holding a climate forest action camp to link these two issues together, I think is really timely. It's something that people who are desperate and upset about climate change can really do that's achievable, that's urgent, that's immediate and effective.

TFSR: Yeah. And again, especially for any listeners that are downriver, besides the climate impacts and all of the ways that that comes to affect us, our loved ones, and strangers, it's very real also with just the water that you're drinking or the vegetables... California is the breadbasket for North America, whether we like it or not. In some ways, good, in some ways, [coughs] almonds [laughs], not so good. But if water is life, this is also life or death.

Well, I think that's all the questions that I had for you, Josh. Do you have any other any parting thoughts or anything that you want to share?

Josh Hart: I just wanted to add there's a series of threats against our area of the Feather River Watershed. A lot of these threats revolve around false climate solutions. So, this idea, one with the logging, that we can log heavily and that will reduce fire risk rather than just the opposite and also this idea that we can continue our hyper-mobile society but just switching from gasoline to electric.

I was up in Thacker Pass in Northern Nevada, the Peehee mu'huh native lands of the Shoshone and the Paiute peoples. This is a lithium mine that Donald Trump authorized when he was president and is going forward. But it's heartbreaking that these ancient lands, rich ecological lands, are just being bulldozed. This is not green at all. It's a complete greenwash.

Another element linked to that Thacker Pass lithium mine that that is really needed to create lithium batteries for electric cars is copper, and Plumas County has one of the largest deposits of copper. So, a company called US Copper Corp is trying to come in. They want to access 1.3 billion pounds of copper to meet the demand for lithium car batteries because the price of copper has gone up in demand, and they want to build a basically a massive open pit mine that has sulfuric acid drainage into the Feather River Watershed. They're trying to use vested rights to say that they already have rights to mine, that they don't have to go through environmental review. A group called the Feather River Watershed Alliance is taking the lead on opposing that. They've got attorneys, they're organizing. People need to speak out by May 8th to comment to Plumas County on that one. If people want to learn more about that copper mine that threatens the whole region, there's more details at FeatherRiverWatershedAlliance.org

TFSR: Thank you for remembering to bring up the mine because I totally forgot. Well, thanks a lot for having the conversation and good luck. I hope that this helps to raise awareness and get more people involved.

Josh Hart: Yeah, really appreciate your coverage and your solidarity and thanks so much for having us on today.

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